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ABSTRACT

Two constructs of behavicr, interperscnal sensitivity and interpersonal strength, are separately examined, revealing that they are multidimensional and bear some relaticnship to each ctber. Significant for teachers is the idea that making ccntact with a learner is a matter of reading his/her behavior, "decoding" it to understand the constructed world from which the learner operates, and utilizing information about that world tc design educaticral activities. The component parts of interperscnal sensitivity (probing, supportiveness, and flexibility) and interperscral strength (coping ability and structuring) are examined; it is proposed that these constructs may be useful in developing an interdisciplinary model for teaching. (Author/MJB)

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INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHER TRAINING UTILIZING TWO THEORETICAL TRAINING MODELS: INTERPERSONAL SENSITIVITY AND INTERPERSONAL STRENGTH

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Based upon 10 years of research with Preservice and Inservice teachers in university settings and in the field two individualized, theoretically based, training programs have been developed for use in interdisciplinary teacher training programs. Because these individualized programs focus upon skills which are intrinsic to teaching any curricular area and interactions with learners of any age, their appropriateness for interdisciplinary teacher training is clearly apparent.

The two theoretical training models I refer to are those of Interpersonal Sensitivity and Interpersonal Strength.

The research and literature on teaching behavior are replete with descriptions of "good" teaching, "good" teachers and a wide variety of teacher training programs. Having sifted through this wealth of information, it becomes apparent that there are specific skills that one can isolate, examine and break down into training components. The Interpersonal Sensitivity and Interpersonal Strength training programs are developed as outgrowths of the above.

What I have included in this paper are:

1. Brief descriptions of Interpersonal Sensitivity and Interpersonal Strength.

2. Brief descriptions of The Sensitive Teacher and The Strong Teacher.

3. The rationale for the development of the two training models.

4. Explication of the training skills of Interpersonal Sensitivity and Interpersonal Strength.

Interpersonal Sensitivity

Prominent factors of Interpersonal Sensitivity are Supportiveness, Awareness and Flexibility. Teachers who are sensitive probe the learner's feelings and ideas and perceive the learner as a significant figure in the teaching-learning interaction. Sensitive teachers modulate their teaching to a learner's Frame of Reference, Language Level and Conceptual Level.

1. Teachers need to possess skill in the area of interpersonal relationships referred to as supportiveness in order to vary their teaching behavior in response to a learner, or groups of learness.

2. Teachers must possess an Awareness of a learner's Frame of Reference, Language Level and Conceptual Level if they are to behave flexibly and sensitively within the classroom environment.

3. Teachers must perceive teaching as an interaction between teacher and learner.

4. Teachers can be trained in the techniques of interacting sensitively towards learners.

5. Teachers can be trained to develop a heightened awareness of the stimuli emitted by a learner.

6. Teachers can be trained to probe for information from learners.

7. Teachers can be trained to display supportive behavior.

8. Teachers can be trained to interact flexibly with individual and/or groups of learners.

Interpersonal Strength

Prominent factors of Interpersonal Strength are Control and Structuring. Teachers who are strong use logical and flexible controlling behavior with learners. They are able to establish a structure within the teaching-learning situation, working cooperatively with the learners, and when necessary, they are able to unilaterally define a structure within which learning can take place. Strong teachers can create a structure whereby learners can express their ideas and feelings, they remain in control of the classroom situation and are able to persist at their teaching objectives without using Dominative behavior.

1. Teachers need to acquire skill in exercising and maintaining control on a logical, flexible, supportive base so that they are able to get on with the business of teaching. They cannot persist at the business of teaching if they use Dominative behavior. They cannot relate to learners sensitively or flexibly if they are preoccupied with exercising and maintaining control over learners.

2. Teachers need to acquire skill in working with learners to structure the teaching-learning situation so that the business of teaching can be carried on. They need to acquire knowledge of the many kinds of structuring behaviors that are tailored to cope with the reality of the classroom environment, thereby decreasing their need to exercise continual control. Teachers must possess knowledge of the kinds of structuring behaviors they can use with individual learners and with groups of learners.

3. Teachers need to acquire skill in the establishment and maintenance of control and structure, and in the ability to persist at their task objective without using Dominative behavior.

4. Teachers can be trained in techniques of maintaining control, established on a logical, supportive, flexible and compelling base.

5. Teachers can be trained in techniques of establishing structure swiftly and integratively.

6. Teachers can be trained to cope with a wide variety of stimuli from the classroom environment.

The Sensitive Teacher

S/he will perceive and be aware of the learner as a significant figure in the teaching-learning interaction. S/he will actively seek for information about his/her feelings and ideas, and be supportive of and encourage the learner's efforts and ideas. In addition, s/he will persist at his/her task, modulating his/her teaching in response to all the information s/he has received from the learner. S/he is skillful in modulating his/her teaching behavior to the Frame of Reference, Language Level and Conceptual Level of the learner.

The Strong Teacher

Interacting supportively with the learner, s/he will swiftly initiate a structure into the teaching-learning situation whereby the business of teaching can be carried on. Using logical means, s/he will persist at a task until s/he has successfully co-opted the learner to his/her Frame of Reference. S/he can successfully deal with a variety of input from the environment at one time. S/he does not use Dominative Behavior with learners and is not preoccupied with exercising and maintaining control.

Rationale For The Development Of Two Theoretical Training Models

In the past century, few educators have reached agreement as to what the business of teaching entails. There is however general support for the belief that teaching involves an interaction between teacher and learner. I refer to this aspect of teaching behavior as Interactive Teaching.

However, before describing many of the dimensions and qualities of interactive teaching, I will present the reasons for the decision to focus upon two specific qualities of interactive teaching - namely, those of interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonnal strength.

Through reports of various research efforts beginning with the work of Anderson in 1939; the rationale for the development of assessment and training programs in interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonal strength will emerge and become clarified.

In 1939, Harold Anderson reported a study of the classroom interaction patterns of Kindergarten children and teachers. Of significance to this discussion of interactive teaching and interpersonal sensitivity and strength are his findings on the effects of the quality of the contacts on the interactions of the pupils with their peers and on their responses to the teacher. For example, integrative behavior by the teacher induced integrative behavior in the children and induced them to respond more spontaneously and naturally. Domination by the teacher was restrictive of spontaneous learning, problem solving and growth and induced resistance. In instances of extreme domination the children became extremely submissive. Supportive of Anderson's findings, Lewin Leppit and White's (1939) classic study of the effects of adult leadership on boys groups provides additional evidence of the powerful effect of the teachers' behavior on childrens cognitive learning and social behavior.

In an experimentally controlled setting, three patterns of leadership behavior were studied. Authoritarian patterns of leadership induced resistance and/or submission and restricted the tendency of the boys to assume leadership roles. In extention of Andersons work, they examined a third pattern of leadership behavior laissez-faire leadership. In this setting, the boys exhibited a high level of aggressive behavior and a low level of productivity - behaviors which seem best interpreted as a seeking for some sort of structure and organization.

A more recent study of significance to a discussion of interactive teaching was conducted in 1952, (Marie Hughes). While studying the verbal interactions of teachers and pupils in classrooms her findings indicated that although a wide range of teaching behavior is available to teachers, they actually use a very small range in the classroom. There is however, one teaching behavior that occurs frequently, that of control. Hughes describes control by teachers in terms of her/his occupying the position of "Boss" in the classroom. "The evidence is clear that most teachers accept the role of teacher as that of director and judge. They control the classroom -- at least, perform functions designed to effect control." Although there is general agreement that teaching involves interactions between teachers and learners, Hughes

provides evidence that in reality teachers actually tend to ignore, and rebuff the comments, questions and explorations of learners and mainly exhibit teaching behaviors designed to maintain control. Her findings indicate the preoccupation of teachers with behaviors designed to exercise and maintain control over learners. One might interpret the teacher's unwillingness and inability to deal meaningfully with the comments of students as the result of a preoccupation with maintaining control. Because he/she is fearful of dealing with behaviors by learners that might in some way minimize his/her control, the teacher finds it safer to ignore questions, ideas or comments that might test his/her authority or disturb the status quo of the classroom system of rules.

Because of my belief in the concept of teaching as interactive, the development of programs designed to help teachers develop competence in interacting authentically and constructively with learners appeared meaningful and sorely needed.

There is little, if any general agreement as to what qualities the master teacher or "good" teacher must possess. There is, however, general support for the notion that along with a plethora of measured and unmeasured variables of personality, physical, emotional and social characteristics, there is one identifiable variable that appears to significantly effect pupil achievement. That variable has been identified by Flanders and others, as Flexibility of teaching behavior. Flexibility, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, refer's to a teacher's ability to exhibit A VARIETY OF PATTERNS OF TEACHING INTERACTIONS, for example: rewarding or punishing interactions, structured or unstructured, reflective or directive.

As elementary school classrooms move towards "individualized instruction", mainstreaming, Diagnostic-Prescriptive teaching and "openness," the need for teachers to possess a wide range of teaching behaviors becomes critical. In order to effectively individualize a program (which involves (1) the diagnosis of individual learner's levels of interests, needs and abilities and (2) the development and utilization of a variety of materials), teachers must develop competence in perceiving the stimuli emitted by each and every learner. Teachers must develop the competence to really "listen" to questions, comments and ideas of learners. Teachers must develop competence to "probe" for information from learners in ways that are authentic and respectful of a learner's privacy and dignity, yet provide the teacher with needed information. Additionally, for teachers to be flexible they must authentically and freely enter into the teaching - learning interactive situation so that their openness to the learners and the quality of their "probings" enables the learner to learn about the teacher as well - thereby incorporating aspects of the humanistic dimension of teaching, which I believe is vital for both teacher and learner.

Three Skills of Interpersonal Sensitivity: Definitions

In order to develop greater competence in interacting with learners, I shall first focus upon the quality of interactive teaching called Interpersonal Sensitivity. In order to learn the skills that are relevant to sensitivity, I will first identify these three skills to be observed in teaching behavior.

Skill One -- Probing

This skill refers to the teachers openness to and awareness of the learner's language level and experiential background and his/her ability to ascribe meaning to these. Additionally, this skill requires the teacher in the interactive process of teaching to probe for this information from the learner in an attempt to extract meaning from the learner's verbalizations and social inter-actions. This skill requires competence in encouraging the learners to share feelings, ideas, questions and experiences without destroying or demeaning the privacy and dignity of individuals. The kinds of questions teachers ask and the meaning they ascribe to the oral, written, social and artistic expressions of learners will provide a basis for the development of Skill Two - Flexibility. The meaning a teacher ascribes to any given expression of a learner is often very subjective. By that I mean that the teacher's personal philosophy of education will influence her/his interpretation of learner behavior. Offsetting this subjectivity, however, is the objective knowledge teachers possess about normative social, emotional and intellectual development of children. Additionally, the objective teacher will also possess knowledge concerning a learner's home and family background and his/her relationship to the community at large.

Skill Two -- Supportiveness

In order for supportiveness to become operational it is important that the teacher feel that the learners' contributions to the interactive teaching situation are as valid as his/hers. If this "feeling" is present then the learner's expressions have significance for the teacher. The teacher would respond to comments questions and ideas in a positive manner. Positive. rather than negative rewards would predominate verbal interactions; responses to children's questions would be constructed to extend a child's thought processes - and/or reflect his/her ideas in new or different ways. The teachers verbal interactions would be of a reflective and non-directive nature. Students' opinions and evaluations would frequently be solicited.

Skill Three -- Flexibility

This skill is dependent upon the development of skills One and Two. If a teacher has developed competence in probing and supportiveness, then he/she can construct or select materials, present subject matter, construct environments or suggest resources that are uniquely adapted to learner's developmental levels. The Models of Teaching, suggested by Joyce and Weil provide an excellent source for creating a variety of learning environments, thereby enabling the teacher to develop competence in flexibility.

INTERPERSONAL STRENGTH

Skill One -- Coping Ability

The second aspect of interactive teaching is termed Interpersonal Strength. Interpersonal Strength in interactive teaching, describes the teacher's competence in organizing the social structure of the classroom to facilitate teacher-learner interactions and learner-learner interactions. In the training program developed, these are basic skills that are focused upon.

Skill One is called Coping Ability. This refers to the teacher's competence in relating to learners calmly and rationally when coping with minor and/or major interruptions, disruptions and digressions from the objectives of a specific lesson. To do this effectively, the teacher must have knowledge of and the ability to utilize a variety of unique and compelling teaching behaviors in order to co-opt resistant learners to move towards specified goals and objectives. Goals can be determined by teachers, curriculum guides, and/or teachers and learners working together. However, regardless of who or what determines objectives, often learners are resistant towards these goals. Resistance can take many forms. There are learners who are overtly resistant to suggestions or directions of teachers, as well as learners who are covertly resistant. The former group are easily identified as their behavior is generally grossly disturbing and highly visible. The latter group, however, may appear listless, apathetic or bored and harder to isolate and notice. It is for both kinds of learners, however, that a teacher's competence in coping is critical. A teacher cannot even utilize a variety of teaching behaviors (assuming she/he possesses them within his/her repetoire), if she/he is flustered, confused and distraught. By remaining in control of his/her own emotions and behavior, the teacher can then attempt to move the learner or learners in the desired direction. It is necessary therefore that one must first learn to distinguish among types of learners and situations in order to identify those which arouse specific powerful emotional reactions within the teacher. Competence in identifying learners, situations and emotions must preceed any attempts to utilize unique and compelling behaviors. Without heightening powers of observation and awareness, the entire quality of the interactive teaching situation becomes inauthentic and mechanistic. The training program to which I refer provides this training.

Skill Two - Structuring

I shall now discuss Skill 2 - Structuring. This describes the teacher's competence in setting up procedures or an organization and/or some variation of these whereby interactive teaching can be carried on. Teachers can and often do impose a structure, a way in which things will be done, or teachers can negotiate with learners about the kinds of structure or procedures they will utilize as they interact with each other. Whether structuring is developed unilaterally by the teacher or multilaterally by the teacher (shared with learners) depends upon many variables. Most prominent of these would be the age and previous experiences of the learners. Objectives of a lesson or series of lessons, the learners' sense of responsibility and cohesiveness of the group would be some others.

It is this writer's opinion that Strength and Sensitivity Training should take place concurrently. A training program so conceived must be implemented on an individual basis because of the variability of the levels of Strength and Sensitivity present in trainees. The findings of 10 years of study point to the need for teachers to interact supportively with learners in order for Strength and Sensitivity to become operational. Without "awareness" of the significance of the learner and without skill in interpersonal relationships teachers cannot control, structure and work supportively and flexibly with learners. It is towards this goal that these programs were developed.